PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR TEACHING AT A RESEARCH-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITY: THE NEED FOR A "CARE-FULL" ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The participation of academics in professional learning (PL) opportunities for teaching plays an important role in promoting the desired outcomes of teaching and learning in higher education (HE). If university teachers pursuing a career in academia however perceive the environment as non-appreciative and non-supportive, in other words, "care-less" to such endeavours, they could become demoralised as a result of human and emotional responses.

The purpose of the reported research was to explore the influence of their environment on the decision-making of academics to participate in PL opportunities at one research-intensive university. It shows what impact the care-less treatment of teachers may have on their decisions to learn to teach.

Findings indicate that academics do not perceive the existing institutional environment as "care-full" (Milligan and Wiles 2010) towards teaching or university teachers. Carving out a teaching career in a care-less environment seems to have a negative influence on academics' decision-making for PL for teaching. One implication of these findings is that university management should realise that a care-full environment, certainly at research-intensive institutions, is essential for PL, for individual academics and subsequently for students and society, to prosper.

Keywords: professional learning, higher education, decision-making, teaching career, "care-full" environments, professional care

INTRODUCTION

Being employed in a Higher Education Institution (HEI) is often an attractive aspiration for many individuals. Nowadays, the choice to follow a career in HE is a deliberate one and not the result of "happenstance" (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997, 32), as was often the case in the past. Being a university teacher, however, is only one of the roles of an academic – a role which is not necessarily highly valued by research-intensive universities and one for which academics are often not adequately prepared (Viskovic 2009; Cilliers and Herman 2010).

As reported by previous research (Marzano 2003; Hattie 2009), the most important influence on students' academic achievement is the quality of the teaching they receive. The Carnegie Foundation (2008) has urged universities to provide PL opportunities for academics as these are key to student success. A study completed by Scott, Yeld and Hendry (2007) in South Africa (SA), found that a focus on teachers and their PL would promote student success. If PL of academics for their teaching function is important for HE to achieve its goals, the question arises as to whether this happens, and if not, why not?

In an attempt to answer these questions, Trigwell (2012, 618) established that the emotional experiences of university teachers could potentially clarify the "limited success of ... well designed programs and the reasons [why] new teaching strategies are often not adopted or even attempted". Structural and cultural environmental factors, as experienced within peoples' daily realities, have an influence on their feelings and emotions (Adler, Adler and Fontana 1987, 225). These, in turn, influence the way people think and act. The emotions evoked by peoples' environments therefore require inquiry – especially for professional teachers within university settings.

According to various authors, human decision-making and learning are linked to the will to learn, emotions and feelings (Crawford 2010; Opfer and Pedder 2011). Literature reports a range of systemic aspects having a potentially negative influence on academics' choices concerning their PL for teaching. These include increasing levels of managerialism, decreasing levels of collegiate governance and the drive to market-like behaviours (Crawford 2010). Other influences point to prevailing agendas of efficiency and performativity (Ball 2003), the absence of an envisaged career path as teacher in HE (Lent, Brown and Hackett 2002) as well as increasing levels of government intervention in HE (Habib 2013).

In addition, Bozalek et al. (2014) found the wellness of university lecturers as having an important influence on their decision-making. The notion of wellness encapsulates aspects of high workload and having to "do more with less" (Johnston 1998; Hargreaves 2000); lack of time (Wright et al. 2004, 146); job satisfaction levels (Bland et al. 2002) and low morale flowing

from the perception that neither academics as teachers, nor teaching and its related activities, are valued.

In our research, most of the aspects listed above were identified and confirmed, pointing towards negative or unsupportive influences on the decisions of academics when offered opportunities to participate in PL for teaching. This corresponds with research by Tronto (1993) who found that pursuing a career in an environment perceived to be unsympathetic about an individual's career aspirations and non-appreciative towards people and their efforts, would be demotivating to most people.

The way workplaces, including universities, set and communicate their values and priorities influences the daily realities of its employees (Crawford 2010; Buller 2015). For instance, Buller (2015) highlights the vital role academic leaders have to play in promoting the best interests of academics. Due to the powerful role played by institutional culture in supporting or hindering PL for teaching, organisations are urged to value employees as their most valuable asset and their PL as the most productive investment (Knowles, Holton III and Swanson 2005). They are thus urged to treat employees in a care-full, rather than care-less way, as this article will argue.

BACKGROUND

The need for Professional Learning[2] for teaching

Teaching in HE is often seen as a non-professional activity or as non-scholarship (Johnston 1998). As a normative act, drawing from the axiological aspects of passion and care, teaching is often unvalued and unappreciated in environments where neo-liberal notions of bureaucracy, quality assurance, outputs and performance prevail (Herman 2015). Referring to teaching as a profession however implies the existence of a career path (similar to Law or Medicine), the availability of PL opportunities (Johnston 1998), the ability to participate in these opportunities (Ginns, Kitay and Prosser 2010) leading to the subsequent implementation of what was learned (Joyce and Showers 2002).

Although referring to teaching at school level, Hargreaves (2000, 152) gives a useful description of "being professional" when stating it is found in the quality and competence of what is done, including the standards, conduct and demeanour which guide it. As professionals, teachers would thus be expected to have specific teaching competence, adhere to certain quality standards and demeanours, undertake constant improvement through PL and reflection (Showers, Joyce and Bennett 1987) and focus on the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) (Shulman 1989). Academics are however often seen as having a "double

professionalism" (Viskovic 2009) as discipline experts or researchers and as teachers in their discipline.

Teaching in HE is becoming increasingly complex and doing it well involves having appropriate and more extensive knowledge and skills than before (Hutchings, Huber and Golde 2006). Based on the challenges and changes in HE, PL for teaching does not seem to be an option, but a necessity (Brew 2004). Such learning aims to address the developmental needs of teachers, to promote the aims of HE (Crawford 2010) as well as supporting the national and institutional ideals for teaching and learning in (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013).

If universities thus want to enhance student learning through the teaching function, the PL of academics has to be a key element of their institutional priorities and supported by the necessary resources (Rowland and Barton 1994). In SA, bodies governing HE have consistently been working towards recognising the need and value of PL for teaching for a number of years. The Council for Higher Education for example recommended that the PL of academic staff should be "at the centre of any attempt to respond to the challenges currently facing HE professionals" (Council for Higher Education 2004, 6). Furthermore, PL for teaching should be integrated within the daily activities of HEIs as well as be responsive to systemic challenges such as transformation and calls for decolonisation of the curriculum.

PL is described as "the need for professionals to continue learning as they practice and advance in their careers" (Johnston 1998, 64). The aim of PL for teaching is thus to ultimately change the teaching behaviour and practices of academics leading to improvement in the quality of student learning (Badley 1998; Cilliers and Herman 2010). Such PL should therefore assist teachers in their "becoming" (Leibowitz et al. 2009) through gaining "new understandings", becoming "able to do new things", or doing "old things better without being aware of it" (Knight, Tait and Yorke 2006, 321). Such "becoming" does not happen during a single event, but constitutes an end point of a complex system of factors, influences, environments and choices (Opfer and Pedder 2011, 378).

As suggested by Van Schalkwyk et al. (2015), institutional spaces are needed where teaching academics can learn and where they and their teaching can flourish. We argue that crucial to environments where teaching academics can learn, is that they are care-full.

Professional care and the creation of "care-full" environments in academia

Academics are often regarded as overwhelmingly rational and the idea of care might not always be perceived as important to them (Barnes 2012). Academics are however not only intellectuals focusing on cognitive activities (Knight and Trowler 2000) but their affective actions and

reactions significantly influence rational thought processes (Lent et al. 2002). Feelings thus often influence and determine the way people think and act. Human decision-making and learning are thus pertinently linked to the will to learn, feelings and emotions (Opfer and Pedder 2011). Appreciating and meeting the professional needs of academics through an understanding of their actual lives and situations, is important (Bozalek et al. 2014), while Tronto (1993) and Buller (2015) highlight the crucial role of professional care and "care-full" environments for academics to flourish.

The notion of professional care comprises a set of values, offering ways of thinking about what is essential for human survival, wellbeing and flourishing in the workplace (Milligan and Wiles 2010; Barnes 2012). Therefore, caring is not so much about what is done but rather "an attitude or orientation, a way of relating to others characterised by values of compassion" (Popke 2006, 506) and professional care is more than good intentions. It rather seems to be "deep and thoughtful knowledge" in combination with attitudes and activities (Gastmans 2006, 137). In addition, Noddings (2002) proposes that an ethic of care approach should focus on the creation of supportive relations and conditions, while Buller (2015, 217) argues that academic leaders should focus their energy "toward people and processes rather than outcomes and metrics". All such care-full initiatives however, start with recognising the importance of the academics themselves (Harwell 2003; Buller 2015).

The simple definition of care-full environments points to environments that are populated with professional care. Such care-full environments are characterised by the presence of support, trust, value, fairness, recognition, clear communication and innovation (Herman, Bitzer and Leibowitz 2016). In practice, enabling and care-full environments in universities might exist where teachers and teaching are valued by peers and those in authority (McKinney 2006; Buller 2015). Such environments are also characterised by opportunities for academics to talk about their teaching and PL (Hutchings 2000), where their ideas are listened to and taken seriously and where they can be reflective about their own teaching practices (McKinney 2006). In care-full environments teaching academics are recognised by peers as making a contribution to an important larger enterprise (Hutchings 2000), while their workload is carefully attended to (Dunkin 2001).

Opfer and Pedder (2011) have pointed out that teachers' willingness to commit to PL is influenced by a combination of their prior knowledge, beliefs and experiences. When teachers thus experience a high level of professional care, their decision-making for participation in PL for teaching will be enabled (Herman 2015).

Decision-making and opportunity cost

All humans are decision makers and their actions are "consciously and unconsciously" the result of a decision or choice (Saaty 2008, 83). Decision-making implies the selection of the best option at a specific point in time based on the comparison and weighing of all available alternatives. The decision-making process is complex, influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Van Schalkwyk et al. 2015; Leibowitz 2016) and consisting of deliberations and trade-offs (Gati and Asher 2001). In HE, academics often struggle to decide between "accumulat[ing] capital valued in teaching systems or capital valued in administrative or research systems" (Knight 2006, 32). At the research-intensive university where the study took place, research output is what is valued and what would advance the careers of academics.

Any decision involving a choice between available options has an opportunity cost or the cost of a missed opportunity. All resources can be put to alternative uses and therefore every decision, choice or action has a related opportunity cost based on "what must be given up" (NetMBA 2015). Losing something when choosing something else thus results in an opportunity cost. When choosing to participate in a PL opportunity for teaching, the perceived positive expectations of the choice should thus outweigh the perceived negative expectations. The prospect of loss seems to weigh more heavily in decision-making than the prospect of reward (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). At a research-intensive university, where research is valued more than teaching, the choice to participate in a PL opportunity for teaching will have a significant opportunity cost for research and the potential regard and reward following from that. Decision-making as part of career development is thus a rational action influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Leibowitz 2016) and subject to constraints in the areas of growth, change and choice (Lent et al. 2002).

INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

This study was undertaken between 2011 and 2013 at one research-intensive university in SA. It focused on the academic years 2007 to 2012.[3] At the time the institution was described as a public, research-intensive, medium-sized university acknowledged as one of the top research universities in the country. In its strategic framework the university articulated its vision for teaching and learning as being characterised by quality teaching, constant renewal of academic programmes and the creation of effective opportunities for learning.

An audit report, based on an institutional audit undertaken by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) stated that PL for teaching at the institution "include[d] a range of units and activities focusing on different dimensions of teaching and learning" (Higher Education Quality Committee 2007, 73). However, the caveat was, and to some extent still is,

that involvement in such opportunities "is voluntary and staff members have no incentive to get involved in them" (Higher Education Quality Committee 2007, 22). The report further stated that the promotion of academic staff did not consider the development of teaching skills and that "the prioritisation of research as an institutional focus has given teaching and learning a subordinate position in the institution" (Higher Education Quality Committee 2007, 20). Since the publication of the audit report, the university has however, actively engaged with this matter. A number of changes have taken place including the following: the Committee for Teaching and Learning became a permanent sub-committee of Senate and Vice-deans (Teaching and Learning) were appointed in most faculties. The institutional changes also include various policies, awards and PL opportunities related to the teaching function. Other changes include establishing teaching fellowships, the adoption of the recommendations of a task team for the promotion and recognition of teaching by Senate, finalising the strategy for teaching and learning and more recently re-instating the institutional teaching excellence awards. Despite these positive changes, it seems if lecturers perceive the teaching function to be sufficiently regulated and structured, but not always sufficiently valued (Van Schalkwyk et al. 2015).

RESEARCH DESIGN

An exploratory institutional case study design was employed for this research. It formed part of a national study funded by the National Research Foundation (NRF Grant 74003). Data were generated from semi-structured interviews with selected staff members preceded by an anonymous electronic questionnaire with open and closed items. This article only considered the qualitative data from both sources.

Research participants

Participants were drawn from all permanently employed academics (n= 952) at the institution. The anonymous, electronic survey was completed by 238 staff members (25% response rate). Based on their biographical information the respondents were largely representative of the academic staff at the time and thus gave a voice to a wide selection of academics.

The participants in the follow-up interviews were purposefully selected. Sixteen academic staff members were identified according to their responses to the survey question asking them to indicate the frequency of their participation in PL opportunities for their teaching. It was accepted that the participants who responded and availed themselves for interviews most probably had an interest in teaching.

Five senior managers were identified for interviews: the Vice Chancellor, the Deputy Vice

Chancellor (Teaching) and three deans. The deans respectively represented a large faculty with many academics participating in PL opportunities, a large faculty with small numbers of academics participating in PL opportunities and the dean of a faculty supportive of the teaching function as well as of PL for teaching.

Ethical considerations

Institutional permission and ethical clearance were obtained before the research commenced (Reference number 582/2011). Participation was voluntary and all respondents and interviewees gave their consent. All data were anonymised and treated confidentially.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION[4]

What emerged from the analysis of the responses from both the senior management and lecturer interviewees, as well as from the open-ended questions in the survey, are discussed in this section. From the findings it became clear that senior management and academics often had different, and even sometimes contradictory, perceptions and experiences about the existence of professional care and a care-full environment for academics as teachers, the teaching function and the PL for teaching at the institution.

Recognition of the need for a care-full environment

Senior managers at the institution seemed to realise the need for, and importance of a "care-full" environment where academics can flourish. Interviewees from this group for example commented as follows:

> "... [w]e are supposed to create an environment in which ... students and staff [can perform] and they can reach their potential and ... just like you owe it to the students, you owe it to the [academic staff] to create an environment in which they can also excel (SM1) ... [and] feel valued ... [and] feel that they can learn and grow ..." (SM4).

The perception of what was being valued from the perspective of academics was somewhat different and it seemed as if they did not experience the support and value as articulated above. For instance, one questionnaire respondent commented as follows:

> "I have been actively engaged in my Department in numerous initiatives to enhance learning in our undergrads particularly ... I am actually one of the few people in our environment who is interested in undergrad learning ... I have never been acknowledged or rewarded in any way for the work I do in developing teaching and learning. It has to be its own reward, or you don't do it" (Q).

The contrasting views of the perceived institutional environment already give a glimpse into the everyday reality of lecturers aspiring to follow a career in HE teaching and learning and wanting to enhance their teaching.

Recognition of the need for PL for teaching

It appears as if the institution does make a number of PL opportunities available. According to a questionnaire respondent lecturers seem to be aware of this wide selection and appreciated the opportunity to choose what is relevant: "The choice is wide and I can select relevant courses" (Q).

The importance and value of PL opportunities for teaching for the survival of the institution was implicit in the words of a senior manager:

> "... we cannot in our programme have people who only do research and don't teach and good universities are research led but teaching fed, ... this is where the money comes from and we must do that well or else we're out of business" (SM1).

Although the quote above might appear to imply respect for the teaching function, the choice of the words "money" and "business" potentially suggests an instrumental view of lecturers as objects of profit making, and could be suggested to be rather care-less.

The need for PL for teaching was also implied when one senior management interviewee indicated that it was the responsibility of lecturers "to provide the best teaching and learning ..." (SM5). Academics seemed to share the managers' sentiments about quality student learning, but their decisions to participate in PL opportunities were often influenced by what the institution seemed to value. They also prioritised their own career paths. An example of this came from a questionnaire response:

> "I can develop my teaching skills and techniques better, and my students will benefit, but I would rather spend the time on publications as ... this will benefit my career and professional reputation as a researcher" (Q).

Lecturers mostly want to teach well because they care for their students and they therefore seem to agree about the necessity for PL in order to provide good teaching, especially when feeling "ill-equipped" for the job at hand:

> "I found it incredible that I was teaching students how to write ... I don't even know if I can write myself or if I can write properly ... I felt very ill-equipped, and I still feel so ... how do you teach

> students to write? ... we were literally experimenting and seeing what has worked elsewhere ... but I felt incredibly ill-equipped to be performing that task of how do you teach" (L10).

The dilemma when PL for teaching was not provided was alluded to by another senior manager when commenting on the way the University treated academics and expected them to perform without taking care of their needs and not equipping them properly as university teachers:

> "... we send these kids in ... the lecturers they are kids still ... they [are] in their twenties, we throw them in front of a class of three hundred and fifty, we make a hell of a lot of money out of them and we don't give them the proper tools to do the job. It's like a sin" (SM1).

Academics also indicated their aspirations and "needs to continually develop" (Q), grow and learn as university teachers through participation in PL:

> "... there's a definite growing need from many of us, that we do want to understand what are the best teaching methods" (L11).

As reported in the next section, a lack of time and high workload however seem to inhibit academics' decision-making for PL.

Working conditions of high workload and lack of time

Excessive workloads including high teaching loads, too few teaching posts, too many administrative responsibilities, limited levels of support and large student numbers all compound the challenging situation of making choices. Two interviewees at the senior management level highlighted this dilemma. One referred to the "escalation of responsibilities" (SM1) when teaching large[r] student groups while another commented as follows:

> "... it's incredible how the workload of [lecturers] has increased, and ... they really do struggle to find the time to engage in this. This is a luxury, this sort of training in ... education" (SM4).

Although it thus seems as if senior management is aware of the time and workload issues of academics, they do not necessarily act on such awareness. A very high percentage of respondents commented about these two aspects of the environment as crippling and ultimately having a negative impact on their decision-making to participate in PL as indicated by a respondent to the survey:

> "There is always a balance to be found between different calls on one's time as an academic. The reality is that there is always more that can be learnt, researched and done but one has to choose.

> In my case the choice to participate in more PL for teaching is tempered by the reward that it will bring and thus how my time should be prioritised" (Q).

The aspects of high workload and lack of time potentially link to the perceived absence of professional care and the environment being experienced as hindering PL. Lecturers furthermore referred to feelings of being trapped in a cycle of too much work and reported loosing certain human characteristics:

> "... there's always more work than the time available ... there's always marking that ... you just don't find the time to do ... and you always hauling work home. You getting up early in the morning or working at night you know, just trying to get things done ... and you're like a zombie when you['re] done ... that makes me feel a bit ... trapped" (L13).

The increase in workload and pressure creates unrealistic expectations, subsequently causing lecturers to lose control and start dropping some balls as shown in the responses below:

> "Our undergraduate class numbers have exploded in [the faculty] over the past years, with increased pressure to produce research outputs. We are expected to simply up the pace and make time (learning for teaching is then far down the list of priorities)" (Q).
>
> "You can have only so many balls in the air, and then you start dropping them" (L2).

As indicated earlier, how we perceive being cared for influences our feelings and in turn our affective reactions often influence our rational thought processes and decision-making.
In light of the findings as discussed above, it seems rather than experiencing a care-full environment, lecturers are experiencing the institutional environment to be care-less.

The effects of a care-less environment on teaching and learning

Resulting from the pressures and feelings of un-fulfilment, guilt, uncertainty and not being appreciated and valued, academics often make plans for their own survival. Unfortunately, such plans are not always aligned to the institutional vision and mission for teaching, learning and assessment and often result in the institution undercutting itself with its own practices and reward systems. One survey respondent indicated how lecturers "side-lined" teaching by "buying in substitute lecturers" (Q). A lecturer described this practice as follows:

> "... I would say that I use my research money ... to buy in replacement teachers to free me to do research than I would if there was more benefits attached to teaching for me. So what I do is I take myself who has that PhD and who's senior and has experience sometimes out of a course and put in someone much less experienced and much less highly qualified so that I can do research ..." (L8).

Another lecturer explained how assessment of students with multiple choice questions was implemented to deal with the challenges of workload and time:

> "... I have chosen to manage [the workload] by multiple choice questions. I just can't anymore. I can't do the grading of three hundred and fifty papers for a test ... and then it's the exam and maybe some of them don't make it. They get to the second exam and it adds up. So I decided ... [to use] multiple choice only at the first year level for all the tests and for the exam" (L13).

Teaching is part of the core business of universities, usually managed on faculty and departmental level, as is the workload of academics. From the findings above it seems if these aspects are not always managed well. It is to the role of middle management in the creation of an enabling and "care-full" environment that the discussion will now turn.

The role of middle management in creating "care-full" environments

The important role of middle management in providing academic leadership and creating care-full environments for the flourishing of academics in their teaching role was mentioned as follows by a senior manager:

> "I think the person that's got the most power in the universe over your life is the head of department ... he or she can tell you to teach a useless course ... they do the teaching schedule so they've got a lot of power ... so if you want to punish somebody without having a disciplinary hearing about it, you just give them the unpopular courses to teach" (SM1).

The power of middle management and the absence of academic leadership was however bemoaned by a senior manager when stating that "in spite of clear messages from top management around the importance ... of teaching and learning, we still do not find this at the departmental and faculty level" (SM5).

As suggested by two interviewees in this research, academics seemed to be in agreement about the importance and need for middle management, specifically the head of department (HOD), to play a role in their being and becoming as university teachers through providing leadership and encouragement:

> "... the main thing is that the HOD must drive [it]. He or she must ... say ... it is important to go there and learn those things (L4) as ... people might not volunteer themselves to go but if you are encouraged [by your line manager] to go ... it might increase the chances of people developing [their teaching]" (L3).

Reality however seems to be different as one interviewee mentioned that she was told by the HOD that it was "unacceptable" to spend excessive time on teaching because it was not "cost-effective to the department" (L11). A respondent to the questionnaire also hinted at not receiving professional care from a manager due to a lack of interest when lamenting that "... [no] ... single supervisor has ever shown any interest in my teaching activities" (Q).

On the other hand, the value of a leader with a different mindset and approach, was alluded to by an interviewee when describing a newly appointed manager who noticed what the lecturer was doing [in terms of teaching and learning]: "I think he is more interested in the people and he sees what you are doing" (L11) [Translated].

As mentioned earlier, research-intensive HEIs usually value research contributions more than that of teaching. A decision to participate in PL for teaching could therefore potentially have a very high opportunity cost and could be experienced as "negative", a "penalty" or even "professional suicide" (Leibowitz 2014). All of these negative experiences might well lead to a perceived "care-less" environment. One senior manager also referred to the potential negative influence of "care-less" environments when commenting as follows: "... unless the environment is right, then people kind of, I think, disengage ..." (SM4).

Often when employees do not experience professional care from their employers for themselves as human beings or their careers, they become demotivated, potentially leading to cynicism, despondency and disillusionment. The influence of such care-less environments were succinctly summarised as follows by an interviewee:

> "... it doesn't impact negatively on the teaching but it impacts negatively on my feelings towards the job" (L13).

From the reported findings above, evidence of care-less rather than care-full management of the teaching function has been cited. The conclusions and the potential implications of these findings are discussed in the next section.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The motivation for participating in PL is closely linked to workplace environments (Knight 2006; Buller 2015). Human choice is influenced by the affective reactions towards our environments and decision-making would be enabled if university teachers knew that the institution "had their best interests in mind" (Buller 2015, 220). Intrinsic motivation plays a role in decision-making and continuing against the odds, but sometimes intrinsic motivation is not enough and then other considerations become important. "Care-full" and supportive environments would enable the decision to participate in PL as university teachers would feel

valued as individuals (Harwell 2003; Crawford 2010; Barnes 2012) and the potential cost of such decisions would be outweighed by the potential gains.

The questions that come to mind is whether HEIs can continue being perceived by academics as care-less spaces or even "battlefields" (Buller 2015, 221), where the environment is sometimes contradicting its stated vision and values. Can university teachers be expected to excel without support when the numbers in undergraduate classes are expanding, a more diverse student body is entering the system and calls for decolonisation of the curriculum are being issued? Can institutions afford to keep on ignoring the value of teaching and PL of academics for their teaching when student success is an aim?

What became clear from the findings of this research is that in a care-full environment the teaching function, PL for teaching as well as the teaching academics as individuals and their wellness would be valued. Although the findings indicate that senior managers seem to think the necessary structures for communicating such value are in place at the institution, the reality and experiences of the academics themselves seem to differ. Such expressions of value should thus be more than lip-service and become part of the fibre of the institution.

The powerful role that middle management as academic leaders could potentially play in the creation of care-full environments and moving teaching academics, teaching and PL for teaching into the main stream of academia were alluded to by respondents. According to a recent CHE publication, there is a crucial role for academic leadership to "creat[e] an intellectual space and language to talk about teaching and learning", shifting the institutional and the national cultures towards valuing teachers and teaching (Leibowitz et al. 2017, 54) and professionalising the teaching function. Creating space in terms of career opportunities, time and workload are but some of the aspects that could be addressed in this regard.

Teaching academics articulated their need for PL for teaching, but because of high workload, lack of time and perceived contradictions experienced in their daily reality, the decision to participate in such opportunities usually comes at a cost and is often accompanied by doubt, uncertainty and guilt. Some of the decisions that academics subsequently take, also stem from their own wellness and survival, as well as their future career paths.

The need for care-full environments effects all humans. This study has demonstrated the impact of a care-less academic environment on the decision-making of teaching academics, rather than what a care-full environment would look like. There might be many indicators of what a caring institution would look like (Tronto 2010) but what this study demonstrates, is that above all, it seems to point to the importance of treating teaching academics as people and scholars in their own right, rather than as a means to an end.

Those in positions of power should realise that creating "care-full" environments, where

everyone in the institution has someone to turn to for support (Buller 2015), would not only be to the benefit of the individual lecturer and the students, but also to that of the institution and society as a whole (Bitzer 2007).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article draws from an unpublished PhD study funded by the National Research Foundation as part of a national project (NRF Grant 74003/90353). We would like to thank the NRF for funding, project members for their support, research participants for their cooperation and time and the reviewers of the manuscript for their valuable feedback.

NOTES

1. Prof Leibowitz sadly passed away while this article was in process of publication.
2. The notion of "professional learning" resonates with an understanding of "the numerous activities which have to do with the professional learning of academics in post-compulsory, tertiary or higher education" (Brew 2004, 5). The term 'professional learning' refers to opportunities for growth, lifelong or continuous learning or academic/educational/professional/faculty/staff development of university academics for the teaching function.
3. A number of changes have taken place at the particular university since the data for the study were generated and the manuscript for this article was submitted. All these changes are not accounted for in this research and publication.
4. All data quotes included in the Findings and Discussion section of this article are the actual words from participants in the research undertaken for the unpublished PhD thesis from which this article draws (Herman 2015) and are indicated in double quotation marks.
5. Direct quotes from the open comments in the questionnaire are indicated with a (Q), while those from the interviews are coded with the letters "SM" (senior manager) or "L" (lecturer) followed by a number for example "L2" indicating a specific interviewee.
6. A short, related version of this article was published in a non-accredited *Festschrift* to honour the work of Professor Eli Bitzer (see Herman 2016).

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